





STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS



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**Jesuit Response  
to the  
Communication Revolution**

**Paul A. Soukup, S.J.**

## THE SEMINAR ON JESUIT SPIRITUALITY

A group of Jesuits appointed from their provinces in the United States.

The Seminar studies topics pertaining to the spiritual doctrine and practice of Jesuits, especially American Jesuits, and communicates the results to the members of the provinces. This is done in the spirit of Vatican II's recommendation to religious institutes to recapture the original inspiration of their founders and to adapt it to the circumstances of modern times. The Seminar welcomes reactions or comments in regard to the material which it publishes.

The Seminar focuses its direct attention on the life and work of the Jesuits of the United States. The issues treated may be common also to Jesuits of other regions, to other priests, religious, laity, men and/or women. Hence the Studies, while meant especially for American Jesuits, are not exclusively for them. Others who may find them helpful are cordially welcome to read them.

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Paul A. Soukup, S.J.

JESUIT RESPONSE  
TO THE  
COMMUNICATION REVOLUTION

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### For Your Information . . .

You will be receiving this May issue of *Studies*, "Jesuit Responses to the Communication Revolution," rather soon after the March issue, and you may have wondered what brought about the long delay on that earlier number. First, the printer put the wrong cover on the issue and had to reprint the whole thing. That added at least a week to the process. Then, in the midst of the printing he scheduled a move of his presses from one end of the city to the other. Two more weeks of frustration. Please pardon the delay. As I write these lines I am contemplating no such problems with this issue.

At the end of March and the beginning of April I attended as a resource person a meeting in Rome of the heads of Jesuit theological faculties around the world. Father General Kolvenbach had called the meeting so that the forty participants might come to know each other, share information, discuss common concerns and opportunities, prepare for Father General whatever recommendations they thought appropriate, and provide a basis for further cooperation both personally and institutionally. It was an interesting and helpful meeting. But it seemed to me that even though it lasted some five or six days, there ought to be a way for the participants easily and directly to keep in touch with each other around the world about the issues we dealt with and others that would inevitably arise in the future. At the moment we have no such means.

However, just recently several American Jesuits were discussing one of the presentations to be given at the assembly on Jesuit Higher Education in Washington on June 5-7. That presentation deals with a nationwide and eventually a worldwide means of easy, direct and swift communication among Jesuits in all kinds of apostolates and communities. The session is entitled, "A Jesuit Satellite Network." It will present the realistic possibilities of such a network. The idea is imaginative and its implementation is quite practicable. The technology for it already exists in this country and around the world. I must admit that I immediately thought of how it would work in the case of the membership and the meetings of the Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality. One could, for example, envision a meeting in which any Jesuit or any group of Jesuits who wished to do so could engage directly and visibly in a discussion of one of the issues of *Studies* with which they agreed or dis-

agreed. But the scope of such a network would be much broader than the Seminar. It would be a way of linking Jesuit apostolates and Jesuit communities in the most diverse circumstances, high schools and parishes and colleges and retreat houses and communities and individuals. Talk about communication as this issue of *Studies* does! Here may be in the future another way of communicating with each other, with our co-workers, and with those whom we serve in our apostolates. The session ought to be enlightening and an opportunity to stretch our imaginations.

Lastly, last chance! As I mentioned in earlier issues of *Studies*, we hope to publish in its one-hundredth issue (November, 1989) a selection of "classic Jesuit prayers" that come out of the four hundred and fifty years of the life and activities of the Society of Jesus. Do you have any examples or suggestions for such prayers? Please send them to me at the Institute of Jesuit Sources immediately. The deadline was June 1, but we can extend that by another month. Thank you for your help.

Have a happy summer. In the fall, the September issue of *Studies* will deal with a way, different from and perhaps more authentic than the one to which we may be accustomed, of understanding God's creative power as it is presented in the "First Principle and Foundation" of the Spiritual Exercises. The consequences can influence not only how we present the Exercises but how we live our lives.

**John W. Padberg, S.J.**  
**Editor**



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## JESUIT RESPONSE TO THE COMMUNICATION REVOLUTION

Paul A. Soukup, S.J.\*

"My day begins with reading the newspaper and ends with television. If you want to talk with Jesuits about communication, begin there; we all do it." Most of us Jesuits can probably recognize my friend's description. The media are inescapable and we have become their consumers. We are also communicators—talking, writing, preaching, teaching. But that is not the extent of it. Another Jesuit friend notes, "Every time I celebrate the liturgy, I experience myself in competition with people who watch four hours of TV every day." America has become an information society. And that is the context of our ministries.

The Society of Jesus has never shied away from communication. Consider this list: Conversation; preaching; catechetics; oratory; drama; ballet; letters; books; journals; Vatican Radio; the Sacred Heart Program; newspapers; magazines; the Legion of Decency; television; videocassettes. Some aspect of our spirituality has led countless Jesuits to hone their skills and to embrace popular communication as means to evangelize. General after general, congregation after congregation confirm this: Communication ranks as one of the four apostolic priorities of the Society.

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Because we experience the world as media consumers and as communicators, we connect to the world in two ways. On the one hand, communication messages and media influence us. On the other hand, we attempt to influence other people, our culture, and the means of communication which shape it. This double relation suggests two Jesuit responses to communication: first, discernment regarding our own intake through the media, and, second, our choices regarding an active understanding and use of the media of communication in the apostolate. In other words, discernment and choice as we engage throughout our lives in the literal “give and take” of communication.

This essay will consider both. In order to offer a context, it begins with a review of the impact of the communication revolution on our individual and collective lives. Communication, the process of exchanging information and influence, occurs through interpersonal methods or through the mass media. However, recent technological advances lead me to focus more on mass communication.

## I. THE COMMUNICATION REVOLUTION

Communication has an impact far beyond what anyone might guess. Because people cannot not communicate, they tend to overlook the structures, patterns, and practices of both personal communication and the communication industry. The taken-for-granted status of communication makes them much less critical of it than of any of the other major structures of society—economic, political, educational, or religious. Yet its influence rivals that of the others: communication defines people’s daily dealings with one another, shapes their view of the world, embodies the bonds among social groups, and even affects the way people think. Communication pervades all aspects of living, from private conversations to public discourse, from entertainment to learning, from prayer to play. Moreover, the mass media focus and sharpen these effects through public discourse and cultural values. The larger, public world provides the conditions for the individual’s world of discourse and value.

What characterizes public discourse, interpersonal practices, and the workings of the communication industry? What effects do the media of communication have on day-to-day living? Many often conclude that the effects of the mass-communication industry are bad. During this overview, however, let us set aside whether these effects are good or bad and just consider them as effects.

Communication systems have changed dramatically within the lifetimes of most Jesuits today and radically within the lifetimes of their parents and grandparents. Ten years ago personal computers did not exist. Twenty years ago bulky, industrial videotape machines provided the only method for program recording. Thirty years ago no one could watch color television. Forty years ago television itself moved from the experimental stage to commercial operation. Popular, mass-market magazines like *Life* and *Look* began fifty years ago. Radio networks started sixty years ago, helping to create the news and entertainment patterns current today. Films with sound appeared at about the same time. Chain ownership of newspapers rose and fell with the fortunes of a Hearst or a Scripps seventy years ago. Eighty years ago newspapers began to successfully use an inexpensive process to reproduce photographs in their pages. Ninety years ago Marconi tried to interest financial backers in radio. And a hundred years ago the telephone moved into the second decade of its rapid spread in American cities. In terms of communication technologies and practices, the world was indeed a different place two to three generations ago.

What has resulted from these rapid changes? Let us look at some of the consequences under three headings: (1) communication, technology, and information; (2) cultural shifts; and (3) functions of communication in society.

#### A. Communication, technology, and information

Because different communication systems, in and of themselves, stress different things, they lead to different cultural patterns. One set of contrasting examples should suffice to illustrate this. An oral



culture (that is, a culture without writing) must preserve its cultural heritage and learning through living memory and role enactments. An oral communication system reinforces memory; it values tradition and the wisdom of elders; its narratives store information necessary for survival; and its speaking styles entertain while they inform. On the other hand, a literate culture places less emphasis on memory and tradition; writing allows a challenge to tradition and the exploration of new areas, including the individual psyche because writing releases the mind from the burden of remembering everything. Literate narratives explore; literacy promotes private reflection; literate societies value privacy and quiet in order to promote reading.

Presently the industrialized West has moved from the patterns of a highly literate society to one that has regained sound. Information comes not only from the printed page but also through the audio technologies that punctuate daily life. The advent of film, radio, and television has led to what Walter Ong terms a secondary orality. People once more depend on sound for knowledge—but now sound has a base in written scripts. Because of this, public discourse in the United States today stands in a paradoxical relationship to the oral and literate patterns. It has reclaimed the immediacy of orality which characterizes face-to-face interaction; it lives in the present tense, valuing and retaining what exists in the present. However, it also shares the deferral of mediation which characterizes literacy: one experiences and knows the writer only through the text. Writing further defers communication through the temporal lag necessitated by the act itself, by the postal system, by manuscript preparation, and so on. Today public discourse has reclaimed the immediacy of orality (hinting at it even in its literary forms) while it maintains the mediated nature of writing (depending even in its oral forms on the mediation of technology). Immediacy in time characterizes virtually all communication which simultaneously achieves that immediacy though technological mediation. This combination—mediated immediacy—provides the unique blend which shapes U.S. culture.

At least four characteristics result from this blend. First, people settle for “bites” of information—the quick report, the magazine story, the plot summary, the movie version. U.S. culture retains and maintains vast amounts of information, making it widely and instantly available. But because any given individual can learn only a fragment of this knowledge, the culture itself downplays the value of extensive learning. As was evident in the 1988 presidential election campaign, Americans define knowledge less as detailed analysis based on comprehensive learning and more as experience, information, and pragmatic answers. What one thinks counts less than what one feels because thinking takes longer. News, entertainment, politics, and increasingly education consist of familiar “friends” saying and doing familiar things, combining verbal material with its visual complement or counterpart. As a culture Americans have redefined knowledge as what best fits their system of communicating knowledge: books and scholarship, certainly for some; quick reference for almost everyone else.

Second, the U.S. culture has changed its communicative style, pretty much across the board. The days of long novels, leisurely conversation, expository prose, reasoned oratory, scientific books, and philosophical treatises have given way to a new public discourse. This public discourse consists at least of shorter speeches, radio, television, newspaper or news-magazine writing, and school or workplace talk. But to those accustomed to the older style, the new seems short, shallow, and semi-literate. In this Marshall McLuhan appears undoubtedly correct: The medium does indeed shape the message. The new style replaces verbal cues with visual ones. It packs information more tightly, and it uses more channels to communicate that data. In some ways the new style accomplishes more. For example, it stresses narrative complexity rather than narrative linearity (think, for example, of “Hill Street Blues,” “Magnum, P.I.,” or “St. Elsewhere” in contrast to “Bonanza,” “Gunsmoke,” or “Dr. Kildare”). The new form also affects people in more subtle ways: the whole style of attending to the world shifts to match the communication environ-



ment. People learn to ignore unfocused music or talk—the radio playing in the background, the television in the next room. Watching television, they half-listen to one another, scanning the environment for the program plot or instant replay. No wonder that counselors say that people must learn anew how to “actively listen” to each other.

Third, Americans depend more on mediated information because the means of communication define their world. In fact many often trust or value such mediated information over immediate sense experience. Ask yourself whether you have checked the newspaper account of the basketball game you attended in order to confirm your experience? How often do you watch for an instant replay to check your judgment? In a more serious vein, whatever one’s judgment about the world may be, that judgment first comes from a narrow slice of the world pictured and described by the *New York Times*, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, the *Spokane Spokesman Review*, the *Los Angeles Times*, CBS, CNN, or a host of other information servers. Famine may strike in Africa, genocide in East Timor or Cambodia—such things remain alien to experience unless people see and hear of them. Communication scholars have coined the phrase “agenda-setting” to describe how the press tells people not what to think but what to think about. Governments and public-relations firms recognize the value of this; they too try to influence public opinion by shaping the information which grounds that opinion. For an example here, think for a moment about the debate regarding the government of Nicaragua. The Reagan administration consistently portrayed the Sandinista government as a local instance of worldwide Communism, as a totalitarian regime imposed by a small minority upon the people of Nicaragua. This portrayal helped to validate the Contra forces as “freedom fighters” deserving U.S. support. On the other hand, opponents of Mr. Reagan’s policies reported a popular government in Nicaragua, one elected by the people and attempting to work for the betterment of the common people. The conclusions of each side seem logical enough, given the data supplied. Whose information bears the mark of truth? The one who sets the agenda helps to define the

world of discourse.

Agenda setting challenges the Church in a profound way. In times past the Church itself defined information and determined what kinds of things benefited its members. Now the Church must depend on the information industry just like any other party. Papal statements, theological debates, tensions in religious communities all find a place in the news—in a news over which the Church has no control and little ability to interpret. While the Church can continue to say or do all it wants in relative freedom, its ability to reach people in general and its own members in particular now depends on the interest and policy of those who control the communication channels which define our society.

Fourth, the mediated immediacy which characterizes the social world has developed a highly symbolic meaning structure. Individuals interact not only with other people but also—as soon as they look beyond their physical neighborhoods—with what Walter Lippmann called “the pictures in our heads.” Modern media did not start this process—people have depended on symbolic representations for centuries; the media, however, did accelerate the process. The media teach people to live in their symbols. Suburbanites encounter photographic images of the poor more often than they deal with poor men and women. Few Americans have visited the Persian Gulf, but just about everyone has a symbolic image of that region. Note that the symbols themselves are immediate—short, sharp, memorable—but act as mediators of the world.

Whatever the symbols, one characteristic cuts across all meaning structures: Today symbolic or rhetorical answers respond to symbolic problems. For example, the evening news presented the African famine to popular consciousness through dramatic photo images. The international response to this crisis involved a series of symbolic events hosted by and featuring some of the most symbolic public personae. Individuals participated in a symbolic way (not by feeding the hungry but by buying records or tickets) and generated millions of dollars in aid. What happens, though, to those outside the meaning



structure? What happens to the local homeless, hungry, or disenfranchised? What of the poor, the sick, the refugee? What happens when the communication structures exhaust the symbols? What happens when leaders exploit this communicative characteristic of our world? The problems remain unsolved even though leaders declare them solved. Nuclear weapons and the arms race remain problems—despite a symbolic resolution through signature of a treaty.

Symbolic solutions work, finally, because along with the symbolic world and the mediated immediacy which creates that world comes a shortened attention span. Symbolized problems have symbolic solutions because those solutions happen as quickly as the problems appear. Long-range planning becomes much more difficult when people's attention turns to short-range solutions. Another newspaper comes tomorrow morning; another program begins in thirty minutes; a new movie opens on Friday. The rapid parade of symbols consumes the symbols themselves almost as fast as they spring into being. News, music videos, prime-time television, and much more have shown starving children, civil wars, natural disasters, torture, and oppression to the point that people have had enough and want to move on to something new. These symbols have lost their force and their connection to human tragedy.

## **B. Cultural shifts**

The restructuring of communication correlates with other cultural shifts. Without attempting to determine any causal sequences here, let me simply describe nine of those shifts and indicate the role of communication.

First, people have changed how they allocate their time. Study after study shows that people give a substantial amount of their daily time to the media, particularly to television watching, radio listening, and newspaper reading. We Jesuits have seen that happen in our own communities and know how much time we ourselves spend with the newspaper or television. Obviously this takes time away from other potential activities—conversing, recreating, church devotions, study,



or sleeping. One priest, looking up from his careful reading of the complete Sunday edition of the *New York Times*, explained how he was much too busy to take a Sunday supply call. Time allocation also influences patterns of activities, particularly group activities. For example, Jesuit dinner hours, community prayer, and recreation hours have shifted to accommodate the evening news, the World Series, or "60 Minutes."

Second, the communication industry has taken on a large part of the socialization process in the American culture. What children and young people learned primarily from parents, schools, and churches even twenty-five years ago, they now absorb from the media. Films, magazines, novels, TV shows, rock music, and other cultural products present role models, illustrate behavior, or suggest cultural understanding. In this the family and the traditional social institutions have not so much lost all power of forming young people as they have begun to share it with a set of media outlets over which they have little or no direct control. Researchers and parent groups often cite the figure that students spend more time watching television than they do in a classroom throughout their first twelve years of school. (However, these groups sometimes fail to note that the level of parental interaction about television programs is the strongest predictor of the effects of television on children's lives.) A similar example comes from church life: People's images of self, world, God, and church come from the media as much as from the Bible or the church. Advertising teaches that goods, looks, or consuming give personal value. Prime-time television treats God as an appeal of last resort, benign but somewhat irrelevant. News media seem more interested in church conflicts than in church beliefs. Spiritual growth demands that people move beyond these shallow but persistent images.

Third, much of the "product" of the communication industry consists of entertainment. As the United States becomes more and more a leisure society, entertainment dominates; the unique profit structures of American film, radio, and television have fostered

entertainment programming and led to a decrease in alternative uses for each medium. The same holds true for many newspapers which have moved to cut operating costs by shifting away from hard-news reporting to softer features which appeal to syndicators. This in itself constitutes reason enough for dismay. However, the entertainment programs and feature articles also indirectly teach very powerful lessons about society, values, and power. These media shape people's perceptions of the world, even when they contradict lived experience. Researchers at the Annenberg School of Communication have demonstrated, for example, that heavy viewers of violent television estimate their neighborhoods ten times more violent than actual police records indicate. To paraphrase Marx, the ideas of the ruling entertainments are the ruling ideas—they set the measure of normalcy. They are the stories we tell and the songs we sing, the pictures we see and the emotions we feel.

Fourth, the growth of the communication industry reflects the growth of an information society and economy in the United States. By 1980 over fifty percent of the American labor force worked in the information sector of the economy. Just one part of this sector—book publishing—earned over \$10 billion in 1985. Communication *is* big business. The commodities of this economy consist of knowledge or information “bits.” Virtually anything can become a bit of information: television programs, news copy, stock-market quotations, personal credit histories, library holdings, films, computer programs all form the bits of the information economy. Human beings too become information bits in the economy of communication. Information providers trade readers or audiences for advertising revenues. Moreover, advertisers manipulate human needs (bits) and sell emotional or even religious satisfaction (other bits). Markets trade in “futures”—commodities based purely on information, commodities made possible through the development of a sophisticated global communication system. The communications revolution goes hand in hand with the development over the last fifty years of this new economic form.

Fifth, the growth of the information economy and the easy availability of telecommunications redefine people's sense of place. Information workers need not travel to work; they can very well locate anywhere on earth and still manipulate data at their office via computer. The place of work and the worker have separated. My brother now works several days a week at home, minding the baby while connected to his office by computer and telephone. This greater independence with regard to place applies not only to work. People can travel or relocate more easily, not having to completely lose touch with family, friends, and support groups. One Jesuit special student wrote his provincial that his telephone bills for calls back to province were cheaper than the psychiatric or medical care he would need to deal with the stress of being far away. The media world also has a role in redefining our sense of place: every city and neighborhood resembles all the others; the same news, films, radio, and television dominate. People do not need the familiar support of parish churches as much (the Latin Mass identical throughout the world): so much else provides that identity. However, the independence with regard to place can ironically make us dependent in other ways. The ability to telephone superiors for advice makes corporate culture more centralized. We have seen this even in the Society: Where men a hundred years ago made prudential decisions while awaiting the mails from Rome, we telex.

Sixth, the United States has witnessed a profound change in political institutions and processes since the advent of the mass-media technologies. Where newspapers made more people aware of campaign issues, radio and television have made people more directly conscious of candidates. Primary elections rather than party machines determine major candidates—a result many attribute to the rise of radio and television. Television and radio give people the opportunity to see and hear the candidates, something which even ease of travel could not have guaranteed. Unfortunately, television and radio also tend to reduce candidates to the level of another commodity, ready for sale to the same markets that buy soap, cars, or deodorant.



Politicians run for office less on the basis of issues or policies than on the basis of image. Even a sitting president must sell his ideas through an appeal to the people, who are less likely to examine the ideas than they are the image and the rhetoric of the proposal.

Seventh, a few companies now own much of the media. Undoubtedly they wield considerable power: the control of information flow, the shaping of opinion, the education of youth, the gatekeeping of news, and the forming of thought patterns. The nature of the U.S. structure of mass communication (a business supported by mass advertising) moves that industry towards centralization. Larger audiences or readerships mean a lower cost per individual reached. This incentive leads towards a highly concentrated system of communication in which a few large companies control "most of the business in daily newspapers, magazines, television, books, and motion pictures." As an example of this concentration of ownership, in 1981 forty-six corporations controlled half or more of each medium; in 1987 twenty-nine corporations did. These include CBS; General Electric; Capitol Cities; Times-Mirror; Gannett; Knight-Ridder; American Telephone and Telegraph; Time, Inc.; Universal-MCA; and several "media barons" (notably, Rupert Murdoch and Ted Turner). Corporate decisions, often taken in complete isolation from the social, political, and moral needs of the people and of local circumstances, shape the communication environment today. Corporate logic leads to less diversity and more limited access to the means of communication for ordinary users.

Eighth, the very design of the mass media shapes their users and their messages. A system designed for national communication works better with national, centralized entities. A system designed to deliver large audiences promotes programming already proven successful at holding those large audiences—what one NBC executive termed the "least objectionable programming." Networks program anything that looks the same so that people will not change the channel. The effect of this programming principle affects just about everything. For example, consider the electronic church. Pastors who began localized radio

or television ministries soon saw those ministries evolve into multimillion-dollar operations as economies of scale and broadcast production values drove them on. The fund raising necessary to sustain the ministries spiraled as well until—for some at least—the program became more a means to raise money (to purchase the necessary air time) than a preaching of the Gospel. At the same time, production values shaped by the commercial media which had already cultivated audience tastes led them to turn to more “entertainment-oriented” Gospel shows. The preacher became a star, a talk-show host, an impresario. The Gospel, with its demands, could not continue that way; religious program research indicates that the Gospel has become a gospel of success, of comfort. The electronic Gospel, like everything else in the mass media, has fallen to the level of that “least objectionable programming.”

Finally, despite all its influence, the mass-media industry in the U.S. does have some limits. Much daily communication remains at the interpersonal level. Word of mouth remains the most valued advertising endorsement. People may learn from the mass media, but they still control their own use of the media. The “uses and gratifications” research tradition has shown that individuals approach the media to satisfy different needs at different times: entertainment, information, background noise, and so forth. The need often predicts the impact of the message. Advertisers recognize the limits of their appeals: they know that the individual reader or viewer does not rush out to buy a Ford or Joy or Pampers. But they also know that their message must be present for those who will need their products and that these people will tell their friends. The electronic church again provides a good example here. For all their spending and publicity, the televangelists consistently reach a relatively small market share and tend to speak to the already converted, who use their programs much the same way that an earlier age used spiritual reading—to confirm their belief. Little in the way of direct conversion takes place through radio, newspapers, or television. But these media do get people to talk.



The changes in communication technology, styles, and structures have influenced personal and social activities. Each of these nine patterns—use of time, socialization, entertainment, the information economy, place, politics, centralized ownership, message shaping, and individual uses—reveals the scope of what has happened in the United States over the last sixty years. These changes—together with the broader changes in thought patterns, mediated information, and technically produced immediacy—begin to illustrate what those mean who claim that young people speak a new, a different language—the language of the media. Religious, cultural, or educational questions and forms which moved their parents no longer speak to this younger group.

### **C. Functions of communication in society**

All communication satisfies the basic human need for affiliation, fostering the formation of groups. Conversation allows individuals to transcend personal histories, to share experiences, and to learn from one another. Interaction provides entertainment or escape from the routine of daily living. Communication provides social understanding and learning, bringing people new knowledge.

As communication reaches large masses of people, it fulfills purposes other than human contact, personal growth, entertainment, and learning. First and most characteristically, such mass communication amplifies messages, delivering an identical content to great numbers. Advertisers discovered the benefits of the mass media in the nineteenth century through national magazines; they continue to exploit them today through radio and television. The electronic church uses mass media as a giant pulpit in which broadcasting serves as an extension of the church service, helping a preacher address thousands of people rather than hundreds. Pope John Paul takes advantage of mass communication through press coverage of papal travels. A variant here occurs when people use the mass media for teaching: the gamut runs from radio schools in Central America to long-distance schooling at American universities to Bishop Sheen's "Life is Worth

Living.”

Second, mass media often join with interpersonal communication as catalysts for change. They demonstrate or dramatize new possibilities. By showing enough people that the world need not continue in the pattern of the past, the media can help bring about new structures or changes in ways of living. For example, doctors learn of new treatment methods from journals as well as from other doctors; farmers learn about technologies and seed grains from farm reports; people discover new fashions and household products through the models of entertainment programming. Here, too, recent papal travels with their attendant media coverage seek to promote religious change and renewal in society by modeling religious behavior in a highly publicized manner.

Third, the mass media organize and maintain a society; they link people with similar interests but at the same time impose upon them a centralized pattern of control, technique, production, and distribution. In this the media both mirror and perpetuate the large-scale structures of contemporary urban society. They illustrate an absolute dependence on those structures: television, radio, and newspapers simply could not exist without the infrastructure of education, mass literacy, common language, banking, and telephone systems. The media also educate people in those structures, teaching what to expect for society and showing how to benefit from the existing systems. In addition, the media themselves become part of the social pattern. For example, newspapers reinforce the order of society by highlighting breaches of order; they support the economic order through selling advertising and enacting a carefully planned sales system. Similarly the electronic church maintains a fundamentalist but common-denominator Christianity within the accepted parameters of television. People tune in for good news, inspiring sermons, and music with the reassurance that God still blesses America.

Fourth, building on interpersonal links, the mass media promote interaction among individuals. This can happen on a variety of levels: two people talking about yesterday's soap opera; the disenfranchised

learning about their rights through reading or viewing. The media provide topics, issues of interest, or points of common experience. One of the reasons for the intense response to the electronic church and to the papal travels is the interaction between people of similar belief that both foster. Individuals feel part of something larger and feel equal to other groups competing for public notice and influence.

Fifth, seeing pope or preacher on television confirms one's faith in another way. The mass media legitimize people, events, things, or institutions. If something shows up in the newspaper or on television, then it must really exist and have value. By now it is a fairly common experience for people to look to the mass media to confirm their experience—reading about the speech they heard the night before, for example.

Communication forms an inescapable facet of life, with the mass media affecting people almost as often as and as much as face-to-face dealings. Modern culture turns to the mass media to amplify messages, stimulate change, enforce order, promote interaction, and legitimate experience. Interpersonal talk or group efforts serve several other functions better: prayer, forming community, affirming personal value, discovering another, and thinking through a problem together. By so complementing one another's functions, these different forms of communication bind people more tightly in a communicative culture.

The previous three parts of this essay have described the links among communication, technology, and information; some cultural changes brought about by those links; and some functions of communication in society. That summary sets the stage for a consideration of how Jesuits might respond both to the media world and to the apostolic circumstances created by that world.



## II. JESUIT RESPONSES

This section addresses two possible Jesuit responses to the impact of contemporary communication: discernment and apostolic opportunities. The first refers to our decision-making process. While the communications revolution has influenced us, the gift of Ignatian discernment provides some tools with which to examine our communication practices. The second suggests some realistic concrete possibilities for ministry in the light of what we have seen previously. Because the scope of the situation outlined above overwhelms any particular response, these suggestions cannot match its breadth. Instead, they might serve as points to stimulate our thinking.

### A. Discernment

As noted above, the means of communication and the messages they transmit influence the civic culture, the civic society, and the civic community in which we Jesuits live as well, of course, as our religious culture, society, and community. Therefore communication indirectly affects the process of every personal discernment. It forms and shapes our perception, providing the background for discernment. Just as fish seldom notice the water in which they live, we swim in the communication culture which affects everything in our lives whether we attend to that culture or take it for granted. To reflect on its images and listen to its echoes can help, though, because these activities make us more sensitive to the movements within us and to our starting point—the “baseline” state against which we must gauge those movements.

Because the greater part of our lives consists of routine, day-to-day living, our normal discernment involves moving from the routine to the routine. In this we trust the overall habits instilled by our religious formation. Think of the process in several different ways: One, use the language of Aristotle and Aquinas and realize that the

virtuous live virtuously through habit. They do not need to reflect on each action but trust the overall direction of their lives. Religious decision making builds on this and depends on a right ordering of interior impulses. Two, think of it in an analogy to walking. Our walking depends on a simultaneous sensitivity to several sense receptors: feelings of balance, feeling of foot and leg movements, and so on. Our spiritual movement likewise depends on a sensitivity to our religious state and reactions. This is why Ignatius stresses so much in the *Exercises* that we know the movements within us. These religious sensations steer us “automatically” in day-to-day events and build up a momentum that is difficult to overcome. This routine makes it all the more important to reflect on how the media affect us.

How might Jesuits respond to this context for our living? Discernment holds one key. The meditations on the Principle and Foundation, the Two Standards, and the Three Classes of Persons as well as the rules for food can guide us.

First, following the Principle and Foundation, we can keep in mind that communication media and the communication industry are creatures of human and divine ingenuity. This will remind us that we should use them insofar and only insofar as they help us to live our lives before God. Because many of us, myself included, tend to form harsh judgments, it matters greatly that we recognize the good here as well as the bad. The Vatican II document *Inter Mirifica* notes this need to acknowledge good as well as bad.

If these media are properly used they can be of considerable benefit to the human race. They contribute greatly to the enlargement and enrichment of people’s minds and to the propagation and consolidation of the kingdom of God. But the Church also knows that people can use them in ways that are contrary to the Creator’s design and damaging to themselves (no. 2).

This attitude should guide all subsequent considerations of the world of communication.

The second thing we might do is to know the context of our lives and to recognize how great a part the communication structures



actually play in them, whether or not we actively make use of the mass media. Just as Ignatius would have us recognize the movements of various spirits within, we would do well to meditate on the ways in which the communication industry and its products structure the basic aspects of our lives. Then we can note how our thoughts, emotions, and spirits fall into sync with that part of our culture. Knowing how the system works and how we work in concert with the system must take first priority. In this we might follow the meditation on the Two Standards and compare and contrast the methods of our mediated world with those of Christ.

In this version of the Two Standards, we see on the one side the media world with its methods, patterns, and lures. This world seeks influence and power; it does not hesitate to manipulate desire, sexuality, or emotion in order to hold its audience; it substitutes entertainment for thought or even for living; it reduces everything to information commodities. In other words, it seeks riches, honors, and the pride of power.

On the other side we see Christ inviting us to follow him. Statements of various Church bodies sketch out a model of communication based on the image of Christ. *Communio et Progressio*, issued in 1971 by the Pontifical Commission on the Means of Social Communication, places unity among peoples as the ideal goal for a communication taught by Jesus (no. 10). Moreover, because of the Incarnation, Jesus is the perfect communicator who identifies himself with those receiving his communication.

He gave his message not only in words but in the whole manner of his life. He spoke from within, that is to say, from out of the press of his people. He preached the divine message without fear or compromise. He adjusted to his people's way of talking and to their patterns of thought. And he spoke out of the predicament of their time (no. 11).

Such communication, at its deepest level, "is the giving of self in love" (no. 12); in the Church and among human beings, it finds its fulfillment in dialogue (no. 114) and reconciliation. Key aspects of a Christian communication include its motive, content, equality, dialogic

possibilities, and appropriateness, according to the World Council of Churches. The World Association for Christian Communication suggests four other characteristics for a communication taking Jesus as its model: Such interaction creates community, is participatory, liberates, and is prophetic. And so this Christ of the Two Standards invites us to a communication which liberates, which reconciles, which identifies with others through love, and which shares all things.

Third, a careful observer would probably note that we respond differently to communication (both personal and cultural) according to different interior states or movements—just as an exercitant follows different rules for discernment in the First and Second Weeks. For example, God's word may well strike a discordant note for those accustomed to the mass-mediated world. Such a one may judge that world as the norm and hesitate to leave it, particularly with its products, riches, and personal esteem. However, even talking about that world with others quickly shows its ephemeral nature, much the way that talking through temptations shows the nature of the tempter.

The fifth and sixth rules of discernment for the Second Week confirm the need to make every effort to understand communication. These rules instruct us to attend to the direction of our thoughts, noting whether they lead to good or evil. What weakens the soul or renders it restless or troubles it, taking away from it peace, tranquillity, and quiet comes from the evil spirit. When we find ourselves disturbed by media content or by communication habits, the Ignatian advice is that we trace the course of the movement from the good to the loss of spiritual joy—"to the end that by such experience, observed and noted down, [we] may be on guard in the future against the tempter's customary machinations." There seem few better ways to learn the power of the media in our lives than this sort of attentive reading, listening, and viewing. A person may begin well and end badly in frequenting the media industry's products. The answer here lies not so much in turning away from the media but in discerning where they lead to good and where they lead away from good. The

same learnings apply as well to our own style of talking: How do we begin and end in our interpersonal dealings? Are we willing to enter into the lives of others? Just as in any discernment, the necessary sensitivity comes only over time and through prayer, guidance, and discussion.

The meditation on the Three Classes of Persons suggests that we may well resist changing old habits. Media, as we Americans tend to use them, take on a strong, almost hypnotic quality. Once we know their power, we can better judge our willingness to change. In a similar way, personal communication styles (ranging from dominance to apprehension) seem so much a part of us that they appear unchangeable. Again, when we know their power, we can examine our willingness to change. The self-knowledge which this meditation brings can give a new dimension to our communication practices.

Finally, the rules for food: Ignatius suggests that we learn what we need by judicious experiment so that we may free ourselves from "inordinate appetite and temptation." As John Staudenmaier has suggested in a previous number of this series, a periodic "fast" from radio, television, film, and newspapers may help us find a clearer perspective. That is, such fasting may help us to learn both the power of the media in our lives and our proper dependence on them. An analogous exercise on the interpersonal level might make us more sensitive listeners. By occasionally resisting the impulse to speak—or, on the contrary, by speaking when we might otherwise not—we gain a new insight into ourselves and into the others with whom we deal.

A side note in all this: I do not advocate pitching every Jesuit television set out the nearest window, boycotting the neighborhood cinema, burning newspapers, or making a vow of silence. I ask only that we recognize the place, role, and power of the structures of communication in our lives.

If the initial stage of our discernment involves knowing the baseline and the movements generated in us by the mass media, a second stage leads us to our neighbor. This Jesuit response to the media



culture grows from our self-knowledge. Ultimately, we learn about how the media affect others in order to better minister to them. If the media form a distinct aspect of culture, then perhaps we should all study the “language” of the media, learn its grammar, and know its movements that we may better spread the Gospel. This certainly does not mean that everyone need earn a specialized degree; it does mean that we all acquire an understanding of the impact of communication on the world, that we seriously examine the ways people communicate today, and that we investigate the ways contemporary communication affects the context of our ministry.

Many questions—both empirical and theoretical—arise here. Spiritual directors and teachers need to learn how the media have influenced the particularities of our spirituality. For example, how different are contemporary images of God from those of classical Christian preaching and art? How have concepts of prayer changed? Do people now see God more as a partner in an interpersonal dialogue? Marshall McLuhan claimed that just adding a microphone on the altar profoundly changed the liturgy. What else has the shift in communication done to the practice and sense of worship? Other concerns for ministry extend well beyond these. What impact has television had on sexuality morality? On business ethics? On human civility? Obviously such questions go beyond the scope of an introductory essay, but they are questions which should impress on all of us the necessity of placing our discernment in communication at the service of our neighbor.

The move to neighbor further asks that we seriously attempt to turn away from any hint of dominance in our own dealings with others. Instead, following Christ, we need to learn how to enter into others’ worlds, how to listen, and how to speak out of the context of *their* lives. The knowledge we gain from the discernment of our own communication patterns and habits will be the knowledge we give.

Upper Canada has sponsored several province retreats that take communication as a theme. These eight-day retreats follow the pattern of the *Spiritual Exercises* but use media products (film, television,

music) to illustrate the traditional themes of the Exercises in popular culture. Retreatants work with a director but also attend group sessions which supply the points for meditation. A film or television program can powerfully dramatize sin or the material of the Third Week or even the Resurrection.<sup>1</sup>

Several members of the Oregon Province as well as several members of JESCOM-USA have put together workshops designed to increase our awareness of the media. Programs suited to community days or weekends explore some of the issues outlined here and invite Jesuits to reflect together on newspapers, films, television, radio, and interpersonal dealings.<sup>2</sup>

## B. Apostolic opportunities

It should not surprise us that some aspect of communication forms a part of every Jesuit ministry—from the Sunday homily to classroom teaching. The confines of our imaginations probably impose more limits on the apostolic uses of communication than any other single factor. The preceding material has sketched some of the roles and effects of communication; it might also stimulate thinking about possibilities for apostolic service. Each possibility demands that we choose the most appropriate technology for the goal in mind. That, in turn, counsels that we first spend some time deciding just what we wish to accomplish. Let me brainstorm briefly and suggest seven apostolic possibilities regarding communication. Whether these are at all distinctly Jesuit works, I do not know. However, in the manner of brainstorming, they may well suggest other ideas so that all Jesuits can incorporate something of them in our works.

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1. For more information about this program, write to the Jesuit Communication Project; 10 St. Mary's Street, Suite 500; Toronto, Ontario; Canada M4Y 1P9.

2. For more information on these programs, contact either Roger Gillis, S.J., at Seattle University, Seattle, WA 98122, or James Conn, S.J., at the Jesuit Conference; Suite 300; 1424 16th Street, NW; Washington, DC 20036.



### 1. *Conversation*

This has much to do with communication, but little with the media. Just about every study of the electronic church indicates that personal conversion results more from personal contact than from a broadcast ministry. People want to and need to talk about their faith. As Jesuits we do well when we invest in the practice of spiritual conversation—not only in spiritual direction or counseling sessions, but in normal, daily interaction. As a Jesuit ministry it has roots in the life of Ignatius, who attracted companions and benefactors by his willingness to talk with them of the things of God. Introducing Tom Clancy's *Conversational Word of God*, George Ganss writes:

Simple and friendly conversation about spiritual topics, with individuals or groups, was one of the chief means of apostolic ministry employed by St. Ignatius of Loyola and his companions. . . . This procedure penetrated and undergirded all the other more visible activities to which the success of these first Jesuits is often attributed.

Contemporary American culture provides little enough opening to God in its public discourse; unfortunately, that public discourse style tends to set the tone for all discourse. People who wish to talk about faith have few models and no readily accessible language. Most of us probably could tell story after story of those who come to us wanting to talk about faith and belief. Students seem particularly needy in this regard since they have not yet mastered all the intricacies of conversation, much less developed a sensitivity to the workings of God's Spirit in their lives. I recall, in particular, one of my students who wanted to talk about an experience in church; she felt frightened and attracted by the presence of God, but she had no language to describe the experiences. This initial kind of spiritual conversation requires little of us beyond our time and a humble willingness to listen and to speak honestly of our own experience before God.

## 2. *Teaching and research*

Several years ago at a JESCOM meeting, two invited non-Jesuit speakers offered the same suggestion as to what the Society should do in communication. "The Church needs the Jesuits to think." Research and teaching constitute a second valid apostolic area within the larger area of communication. Since communication plays such a dominant role in worldwide culture, careful research and analysis must unmask its taken-for-granted structures, its manipulative practices, its alliance with consumerism, its cooperation with the structures of injustice. These structures exist and influence people both on the level of mass culture and on the level of individual interaction. On a more positive note, the communication industry and its workers look to the academic community to help develop a communicative ethics and measures of quality. Federal regulatory agencies and the judiciary face monumental tasks in reconciling Constitutional rights of free speech, for example, with limits on pornography or deceptive trade practices or other harmful content. Congressional agencies periodically assess communication trends and recommend legislation and policy to the Congress. The Church itself asks for analysis and guidance in choosing among options in the area of communication and in developing a theological reflection upon its communicative practices. All of these groups rely on the academic community for information, research data, informed opinion, and well-argued suggestions.

At the request of Father Arrupe, the Society established the Centre for the Study of Communication and Culture, an international institute with the purpose of facilitating communication research for the Society and the Church. Located in London, the Centre has formal links to the Gregorian University and informal ones to Jesuit educational and production centers around the world. It publishes a quarterly newsletter, *Communication Research Trends*; each issue reviews an area of study (radio, public-interest broadcasting, media education, and so forth), noting the international network of researchers and their work and adding a supplement on the specific religious

questions raised by each area. The Centre staff edits several book series on communication issues—communication and human culture, communication ethics, and international communication. They also maintain links to Catholic and ecumenical communication agencies in each country. The Centre welcomes visitors, will house researchers for up to several months, and supports Jesuit interns.

Teaching of communication takes place on every level. Media education programs in high schools or parishes help people to discern the role of the mass media in their lives and to avoid inordinate attachments. Skills courses teach people public speaking, active listening, personal expression, marital communication, small-group skills, critical evaluation, and so on. Higher-level courses prepare men and women for work as professionals in the communication industry. This group forms a critically important body since they can become a kind of leaven in the industry. Even to imbue them with values of cooperation with peers and concern for the poor and margined can have lasting effects. For example, a journalism teacher at Santa Clara University has students in his introductory news-writing courses do a profile not of a successful entrepreneur or civic leader but of a homeless person or an “outcast.” Students often resist the assignment but come away from it with a new understanding of human dignity, oppression, and compassion. Another example: A television production teacher has the students do community-service documentaries, working with the poor. They come away from the course not only with a new skill but with a product that has helped others.

Jesuits can contribute significantly in all these areas because we bring a particular outlook that places communication in a theological or Christian context. Communication practitioners, church workers, and seminarians ask in particular for input to guide their thinking on the relation of theology and communication. Many seek more dialogue between the disciplines, a call endorsed by the bishops of the United States. Communication workers have proved quicker at accepting this challenge, leading to what a friend calls “a lopsided dialogue.” He continues, “Even though the impetus for dialogue



comes from the theologically-concerned, the shaping influence of communications on theology seems to get more attention than the reciprocal influence.” People in communication know their jobs and their discipline, but they would like guidance and serious reflection from those who can place their work in a theological context.

### *3. Alternative uses*

A third area of apostolic engagement involves alternative uses of communication media and new technologies. Because of the dominance of the broadcast system in the United States, people tend to think of the mass media when they think of communication. However, for each particular medium (from printing to radio to telephones to television to film to computers), other uses exist. Many of these communication technologies could serve evangelical or apostolic ends. For example, some mission areas use radio as a community medium, allowing individuals to send messages on a kind of “party line” program. Australian aborigines use home video recorders to preserve tribal meetings and to incorporate distant members into the ongoing affairs of the group. Telephone conferencing services allow more people to share in decision making and lead to a more dialogic pattern of group communication. Traditional media—puppets, songs, and so forth—provide a point of entry and a technology unlikely to frighten anyone away. As Jesuits we face the challenge to incorporate these tools into the full range of our existing ministries in ways that liberate people and allow people to hear the Gospel and to know the love of Christ. At the same time we can seek to develop these new means to accomplish new apostolic purposes.

Some other examples that come to mind include the use of videocassettes to provide religious instruction or programming (Catholic spirituality, for example) for home use. Schools, retreat centers, or parishes could set up video libraries of materials for their members. People might take the lead in lobbying corner video rental stores to carry religious videos as well as movies, music, and workout tapes.



Computer conferencing and religiously oriented computer bulletin boards offer another possibility, one already in use in the New York area.<sup>3</sup> Satellite-distributed teleconferences bring retreat speakers simultaneously to college campuses across the country. Local teleconferences might provide access to high schools or universities to those who could not otherwise afford it. Computer-assisted instruction and simulations work in almost any discipline.

#### *4. Media ministry*

Too often, thinking about media work usually begins here: Why not a Jesuit Jerry Falwell, a Catholic communication empire? Some may well have the talents and the call to work in a national media ministry; they certainly need the support and prayers of the rest of the Society to avoid the temptations to riches, honors, pride that seem built into the work. Most of us will not work at this level, though. Instead, more realistic possibilities include writing scripts, stories, and songs; producing newspapers, magazines, radio and television programs; supplying ideas and introducing people to one another. Everyone in the Society can also enter into a kind of media ministry by making his talents or expertise available to local communication professionals. For example, reporters and news editors at every city's newspaper or TV station look to pastors and teachers for information and comment on church and world events. Do not turn down an interview. Let people know that you will be happy to answer questions or to give some background information. Suggest story ideas. Provide other contacts by a willingness to introduce people.

Many dioceses in the United States have communication offices,

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3. The Fordham Jesuit bulletin-board service can be reached at (212) 579-2869. Another religious computer service, sponsored by UNDA, the association of Catholic communicators, appears on NWI under the conference name FISHNET, and can be accessed through Tymenet. Finally, many Jesuit universities belong to BITNET, an intercampus computer network (for example, those who wish can reach me at this electronic mail address: PSoukup@SCU.bitnet).

and some produce magazines or audio or video programs. Every Church communication office that I know of would welcome help—perhaps not as a director or a star, but as a researcher, a writer, an idea person, a contact. These kinds of jobs may be full-time or part-time. A media ministry needs both; most communication directors will gladly describe their needs.

### 5. *Public relations*

Public relations often conjures up a disreputable image of a propagandist who will market or publicize any product or individual that can afford the necessary fees. Though not without its problems, p.r. does perform a necessary service which can have apostolic value. Because the news industry continually searches for information, the public-relations specialist helps by preparing and disseminating stories about an individual, group, or institution. Basically, p.r. involves telling your own story in the way you wish to tell it either through the established media or directly to others. “Through the media” involves preparing press releases, calling editors, or otherwise attracting attention. Telling the story directly can involve anything from newsletters to billboards to advertising.

Most large Jesuit institutions have a full-time staff to handle both direct and indirect public-relations work. However, Jesuits too can participate in this, especially through their writing and their willingness to tell people about their lives. Even things as simple as faith sharing, devotional writing, or letters to the editor touch other people’s lives, sometimes in profound ways. No one else can tell your own story as you can. This kind of p.r. can also bring attention to serious public concerns—the homeless, AIDS ministry, right-to-life work, refugee services—with which Jesuits work but which the local press often overlooks.

### *6. Ministry to media workers*

The men and women who work in the communication industry need the Church's ministry and attention, perhaps even more than others. Certainly their decisions and policies influence millions. Speaking to industry representatives in Los Angeles during his last visit to the United States, Pope John Paul described their situation in this way:

Daily cares oppress you in ways different from those arising in other kinds of work. Your industry reflects the fast pace of the news and changing tastes. It deals with vast amounts of money that bring with them their own problems. It places you under extreme pressure to be successful, without telling you what "success" really is. Working constantly with images, you face the temptation of seeing them as reality. Seeking to satisfy the dreams of millions, you can become lost in a world of fantasy. At this point, you must cultivate the integrity consonant with your own human dignity. You are more important than success, more valuable than any budget. Do not let your work drive you blindly; for if work enslaves you, you will soon enslave your art. Who you are and what you do are too important for that to happen.

These people—whether in Hollywood or in any local community—particularly need to hear the good news of the Gospel; these especially need a word of liberation, of reconciliation, of forgiveness. And yet, unfortunately, many of them judge that the Church opposes them and their work; many feel that the Church has rejected them.

The Society can offer a tremendous service to these men and women by representing the Church to them, by offering them the Exercises, by showing a willingness to listen to and talk with them, without condemnation or rejection. Again, in the words of the pope to the communication professionals, "The Church wishes you to know that she is on your side. . . . the Church stands ready to help you by her encouragement and to support you in all your worthy aims. She offers you her challenge and her praise." The Society can also offer to them a spirituality that has recognized the value of art, of architecture, of eloquence, of drama, of music, and of dance. The history of



the Society before the suppression shows an esteem for the arts. Books describe a Jesuit architecture, a Jesuit drama, even a Jesuit ballet in seventeenth-century France. After the restoration the Society has limited its efforts in the arts somewhat, but individuals in each generation still find vitality there. A closer contact with the creative community and the communication industry might lead to a renewal of that tradition in our own day. Besides this, the Society can give a spirituality of discernment: we recognize that not everything is good and that not everything good leads to God's glory.

Personal contact provides the first step. One California Jesuit invited people he knew in Hollywood to a low-key weekend retreat. Because of schedules, only a small group met, but these responded enthusiastically to the opportunity for quiet time, for discussion of their search for faith, for sharing common experiences, and for probing ethical issues each faces daily. All want to make the retreat an annual event, and all want to bring friends and co-workers. Jesuits could sponsor similar events in every city.

### *7. Advocacy*

Many of the Protestant churches in the United States have taken the lead in working for the rights of individuals and communities in the face of communication-industry or governmental opposition. In this work they have recognized that the Church must take the side of the weak and the oppressed in clashes with powerful vested interests. For example, some years ago the Broadcast Commission of the National Council of Churches entered into litigation on behalf of a minority group challenging the license renewal of a southern TV station which they accused of discriminating against blacks. They further argued that the Communication Act of 1934 mandated representative local ownership of broadcast properties. The FCC and the courts upheld that claim, thus opening the door for greater minority participation in broadcasting.

Earlier parts of this essay have briefly indicated some of the power of the communication industry; here are some problems facing

the industry and the country. As the ownership of the industry becomes more concentrated, the circuit of communication excludes more and more individuals. Justice demands that the government continue to enforce its policy that the broadcast spectrum belongs to all people and that broadcasters hold a public license for its use, a license conditional upon their willingness to serve their local communities. However, in the U.S. today radio stations need no longer demonstrate service to their communities beyond showing that they made a profit in their business. Local media can exclude local viewpoints if they so choose. Large corporations and the rich can afford to buy time, but who will give a voice to the voiceless? Justice demands that the weak have some safeguards from manipulation. When, for example, toy manufacturers now produce program-length commercials, who represents the rights of children, many of whom cannot yet understand the rhetorical function of a commercial? Justice demands at least a measure of respect for the human person. When pornographers and advocates of violence against women set up 900 numbers and the telephone companies say they have no legal basis to refuse them, who will carry the issue to the courts? These and other similar communication issues cry out for an advocate.

The Catholic Church became the first international body to define the right to communicate as a human right (in its Declaration on the Means of Social Communication, *Inter Mirifica*, of the Second Vatican Council). This right encompasses both a right to information and a right to expression. This right faces a serious challenge on the international level as the more highly developed economies exercise an economic stranglehold on the means of communication while the socialist and communist economies set severe limitations on access to communication. Neither side is completely wrong and neither is completely right, but the international communication structures now in place reflect the decisions and biases of past activities. Who will represent the less-developed countries when international organizations establish satellite frequencies and broadcast standards? Who will represent the common people in the international image markets?

A recurring problem of the Church in regard to these national and international issues is the lack of local support. The USCC staff, working from the priorities of the bishops, can and does lobby Congress and the FCC on the full range of communication problems; however, its lobbying pales beside that of the National Association of Broadcasters because it has little grass-roots support. The NAB can orchestrate a letter-writing campaign from member stations and from corporations sympathetic to the industry's outlook. The USCC efforts on behalf of the Catholic Church need the support not only of local bishops, but also of parishes, schools, and individuals across the country.<sup>4</sup>

The Society of Jesus with its schools and its national and international communication networks can do much in this regard. It can foster better understanding across cultures and between regions. It can give young people a more global vision. It can exercise institutional leadership in representing the rights of the weak or powerless. Individuals can take up specific issues and work with advocacy groups. Local communities can explore specifically local issues and join with others in their support.

One final note about these apostolic possibilities: By its very nature communication work involves collaboration. In any of the areas indicated in this section, the Society need not work alone. In fact individuals already do work (and should continue to explore new ways to cooperate) with men from other provinces, with local and national Catholic communication offices, with religious of other communities—at least to coordinate efforts. Unfortunately, many Catholic communication efforts tend towards fragmentation and entrepreneurship; with its tradition of corporate apostolates, the Society offers a charism which will prove valuable for the Church in this area. While we have much to learn from others, we should not hesitate to share what we have.

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4. The USCC Communication Office's monthly newsletter, *Proclaim*, features a report of current regulatory and legislative action support by the Conference.



### III. CONCLUSION

“Hearing this [the proclamation of the resurrection], the listeners were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘What must we do?’” (Acts 2:37).

Any communication leads to choices. When we, as Jesuits, listen to the Gospel, to the Church, and to our contemporary culture, we too ask, “What must we do?” I have suggested in this essay that we do two things: (1) through prayer, discernment, and study, know ourselves and the impact the culture of communication has on us and on our neighbors; and (2) through apostolic choices, either enter into that world as inculturated missionaries or stand against that world as prophets.

Psychological theorists of communication have an aphorism, “One cannot not communicate” since even silence is eloquent. What must we do?

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Editor,

In his interesting article, "Where Do We Belong? United States Jesuits and Their Memberships" (*Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, January 1989), George Wilson's emphasis on facing reality before judging it was refreshing. In pursuit of this goal, however, I'd suggest that there are two or three other "memberships" of even greater importance than the ones he mentioned. Just because these others are all-encompassing, there seems to be some danger that they may be overlooked.

There is our personal friendship and converse (better, sharing of life) with and in Christ, who gives better support and strength than any other friend, and whose claims can be absolute. Then there is our membership in the Catholic Church, His Body, or better, in this context, His Bride. I'm not clear whether our promised obedience (which is more than mere "loyalty") to the Pope sets up a third "membership" or should be simply subsumed under our membership in the Society of Jesus.

I realize that to include these "memberships" in the context of the community discussions which George recommends runs some risks. For example, it could lead to making public some aspects of our spiritual lives that are better left for private reflection with a spiritual director. Also it could bring to light seemingly irreconcilable divergences on fundamentals of faith and practice in ways that could be quite painful. Yet, if we fail to include these other "memberships," we leave the most basic realities of our lives on the side, thus condemning ourselves to the superficialities of religious ideologies that Wilson rightly castigates.

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